

fields close to the lake. But in subsequent years, cultivation of this area led the harriers to abandon the roost. Reports of harrier roosts from India have been few, and although major sites have been identified (Clarke 1996, Rahmani and Manakadan 1987, Satheesan and Rao 1990), much work remains to be done to identify the smaller, perhaps more numerous sites (Prakash 2001).

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12. OCCURRENCE OF AMUR FALCON *FALCO AMURENSIS* RADDE AND LESSER KESTREL *FALCO NAUMANNI* FLEISCHER IN MYSORE, KARNATAKA

The Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* and Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* were observed in an open expanse of grassland at the Mandakhalli Airport area (12° 13' N, 76° 39' E), c. 8 km south of Mysore city (12° 18' N, 76° 33' E) on January 12 and 14, 2001. On the 12th, SS saw a few kestrels at a distance at the Mandakhalli lake nearby, while he was conducting a waterfowl census. He counted a total of thirteen birds, and since it was unusual for kestrels to congregate, he attempted further investigation but could not confirm the identity of the birds. On the 14th, shortly after dawn, we observed several hundred Amur Falcons take off from eight *Acacia nilotica* trees along the periphery of the airfield. They took off singly first, then in twos and threes and finally in small groups of up to seven birds. The estimated number of birds was around 550, the male:female ratio being approximately 60:40. The male was identified by its unmistakable sooty grey body, with rusty red vent and legs. In flight, the white underwing coverts contrast with grey primaries and secondaries. In the female, grey upper-parts, white throat and collar, a blackish stripe on the cheeks, and markings on the underside – longitudinal spots on the chest and lateral barring further down to the abdominal region. The presence of Lesser Kestrels was discerned after light conditions improved, but they were fewer in number than Amur Falcons. We counted 89 birds, of which 56 were males and rest females. Males were readily identifiable by their

unmarked bright brown mantle and back, a grey sub-terminal band to the wings, relatively unmarked chest and absence of a cheek-stripe. Paler claws vis-à-vis the Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, was noted for both sexes using a 15-45 x 60 spotting scope. Females were similar to Common Kestrel females, which differed in having dark claws. After light conditions improved, we could observe these small falcons better. They kept flying about in scattered flocks for around fifteen minutes after leaving the roost, but slowly spread throughout the entire airfield and further. Most of them moved away in a southerly direction, but 35 *F. naumanni* remained behind. The individuals were mostly males and were spread widely in the airfield. In the evening, at 1730 hrs, we could see most of the Amur Falcons and Lesser Kestrels settling in the *Acacia* trees rather noisily, swarming around the trees, frequently dashing in the air as if catching something, just like bee-eaters. Ali and Ripley (1978) recorded similar behaviour for the birds as they settle to roost. The birds were present well before sunset and began to group-up just after. They were present the following morning, but did not return in the evening, or for the next two days. We assume that by then they had left the area completely.

Amur Falcon is described as a passage migrant, with occasional breeding records from N. Cachar, now in Assam (Ali and Ripley 1978), but none in the past several decades. It has been recorded as on passage at several points in

peninsular India, which Ali and Ripley (1978) refer to as 'stragglers'. This sighting is the second for Karnataka after more than a century; the last published report goes back to 1898 in Karwar (Davidson 1898).

Lesser Kestrel is listed as an endangered species in the BirdLife International Red Data Book on Asian birds (BirdLife International 2001). Ali and Ripley (1978) write for *Falco naumanni*, "Status uncertain. Apparently rare winter visitor; perhaps more correctly as an irregular through passage migrant to E. Africa like the Red-legged Falcon, a few stragglers remaining behind." It has been obtained as thus from several locations in a wide area of north and north-eastern and peninsular India, up to the Nilgiris in the south. It has also been observed in the Maldives (Ali and Ripley 1978). In more recent times, it has been recorded from Corbett National Park, Uttaranchal (Naoroji 1999), Kaziranga National Park, Assam (Barua and Sharma 1999) and Wynaad, Kerala (Zacharias and Gaston 1993) in India, Dera Ismail Khan district in northwest Pakistan (Kylanpaa 2000) and from Sri Lanka (Hoffmann 1996). There is a reliable but unpublished record of the bird from the Biligirirangan Hills in south Karnataka (Srinivasa *et al.*

unpublished). Ali and Ripley (1978) mention *F. amurensis* and *F. naumanni* migrating together. Arjal (1976) records the same from Nepal, and our sighting corroborates it.

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13. NATURAL HISTORY NOTES ON CHICKS OF THE NICOBAR MEGAPODE *MEGAPODIUS NICOBARIENSIS*

The Nicobar Megapode *Megapodius nicobariensis* is one of the 22 species of megapodes and is endemic to the Nicobar Islands, India. Megapodes are a unique group of birds as they utilise external sources of heat to incubate their eggs (Jones *et al.* 1995). Superprecocial chicks of megapodes hatch at depths from c. 20 cm to 1 m or more from the incubation site (Jones *et al.* 1995). In order to emerge from the incubation site they must dig to the surface, an action they perform without any assistance from the adult (Frith 1959, Jones *et al.* 1995). The time taken in moving from the level of hatching to the surface varies with depth, the nature and compaction of the substrate, and energy reserves of the individual hatchlings

(Jones *et al.* 1995). Observations of the chicks of the mound building Nicobar Megapode have not been published in detail. This note describes the behaviour of chicks of the Nicobar Megapode.

This study was carried out between December 1995 and May 1998 on Great Nicobar Island (6° 76'-6° 79' N, 93° 81'-93° 84' E). All the mounds in the study area were monitored. When an egg was laid, it was dug out and weighed to the nearest gram using a spring balance. After weighing and marking, the egg was reburied in the same egg chamber and the mound was re-built. To monitor the egg as well as hatchling behaviour inside the mound, glass plates were